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**Magisterský program IEPS**

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**Opponent's Evaluation of the M.A. Thesis**

Title: **EXPLAINING RUSSIA'S FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS THE UNITED STATES UNDER VLADIMIR PUTIN (2000-2008)**

Author: **Pavla Korandová**

Author of the Evaluation: Mgr. Markéta Žídková, M.A.

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Mrs Korandová devotes her M.A. Thesis to the topic of Russian foreign policy. The title promises to focus on Russian foreign policy toward the United States during the Putin era.

**The aim** of the Thesis is stated in the section Aim of the Thesis“ (p. 3-4) as well as in the Introduction (p. 9). The author promises “(...) *to achieve a theoretical understanding of Russian foreign policy regarding the US after the collapse of the USSR with a strong focus on Vladimir Putin's first mandate (maybe two mandates) (...)*“. Relying on this statement, it is hard to understand the aim of the Thesis as well as the researched period. It is also difficult to understand why the author prefers Putin's first term to the second or why she excludes the Medvedev era from her work. In addition to that, any **hypothesis** is missing. In the Abstract (!), the author mentions that the Thesis is “*empirical case study*“, however, there is no further note about **methodology**.

It is actually difficult to understand the structure of the text. The “Table of Contents“ (p. 7) offers a list of four main chapters ( - Introduction and Conclusion are included in counting). All four chapters that built the body are further divided into five or six sub-chapters.

Chapters 2 (“Russia's 'Offensive Realism'“) and 3 (“Ideological Platforms of Russian Foreign Policy“) try to provide a kind of theoretical understanding of the topic of Russian foreign policy. Among other topics, terms “Realism“ as well as “Offensive Realism“ are described (sub-chapters 2.1, 2.2), a short history of the Russia-US relations is provided (2.3), the author refers to terrorism (2.4), and security (2.8); Russian national identity (3.3), Putin's “Third Way“ (3.4), or “President Bush's Foreign Policy from Moscow's Perspective“ (3.6) are discussed. At first glance, these two chapters offer a cocktail of topics, none of which provides a stable and reliable basis for the Thesis.

A more detailed look at chapters shows further problems. There are no introductory paragraphs to chapters, the author goes directly to the first sub-chapters. There, many terms are explained in a very simple, incorrect way, for example “Offensive realism“ (p. 19-21), or “Security in the Realist Approach“ (p. 31-33; for the term “National security“ see pp. 18-19). Sub-chapter 2.1 titled “Realism as Theoretical School“ claims for example that “*Realism (...) started to formulate views of international relations after World War II (...)*“. It names Thucydides, however, it does not mention any scholar of the 20th century or why the term “offensive realism“ was chosen as the right one to describe Putin's foreign policy.

Since the theoretical basis of chapters 2 and 3 are weak, let me get to more “practical“ parts of the Thesis. Many disputable statements may be picked up from chapters 2-6. For example: *“Putin’s realist approach led Russia to the club of great powers. He was able to recognize the main objectives of his country, grasped the opportunities which were at stake (...)”* (p. 25). First of all, could the author name scholars who agree with her view? Secondly, could she discuss FACTS that support her statement? (A recent situation shows that Russia’s economy is weak and Mr Putin has failed to restructure this sector; Russia’s voice at the international arena has been weakening for at least two years if not longer; Russia’s important allies belong to non-democratic club – let’s name Venezuela or Nigeria; the country’s position in CIS has weakened dramatically; SCO is dominated by China; Moscow’s position at BRIC is the weakest one; many other examples could be mentioned).

There are further problems (connected with possible questions), for example:

- References are missing in some parts of the text (e.g. p. 22 where „détente“ is being discussed and 1970s compared with the current situation).
- A very subjective description of current international environment is provided (p. 22, 23, 24) – with almost no references.
- Definition of terrorism (p. 24) – no references;
- Sub-chapter 4.3 (titled “What prevented the West from Closer Cooperation with Putin’s Russia?”, pp. 59-65) lists “*many factors*“ that “*contributed to uneasy cooperation (...)*“; the author names Chechnya as the first problem (p. 59), Putin’s restriction over media as the second (p. 60), etc. Why these issues were chosen as major factors? Does Mrs Korandová relies on any scholar or it is her own list? Why does not she name Russia’s uneasy position towards Iran for example (or any other international issue that complicates the US-Russian cooperation)?
- According to the author, “*(...) parallelism between Soviet and Russian foreign policy proves to be extremely useful in understanding the new direction that Putin imprinted on the relationship between Russia and the United States.*“ (p. 11). This is offered as a fact;
- As for the used **literature**, the author names five major texts in the Introduction. She fails to analyze them at all, so the reader is simply informed that the author read some “*scholarly sources*“ as well as some “*primary sources available on the Internet*“ (p. 11). Majority of used sources (books, articles) were published in 2002-6, only a few in 2007-8 and none in 2009. Major primary sources (available for example at Kremlin.ru) are missing.
- The text suffers from lack of references in many parts.
- The author states: “*(...) Russian foreign policy lies between doctrine and pragmatism*“ (p. 10). She wants to understand the relationship between the Russia and the US and in order to do so, she considers it necessary to focus on those two “factors“ (i.e. doctrine and pragmatism; pp. 10 and 11). However, she fails to explain the term “doctrine“ and replaces it with “ideology“. In connection with this, a question must be posed: What ideology of the current Russian regime the author recognizes? In other words: is there any specific ideology used by the political elite – internally or abroad?
- In connection with the WTO policies and Russia’s position towards this organization (pp. 58-59), could the author describe Putin’s steps in summer 2009? Does she consider them as a part of his “offensive realism“?
- The Conclusion (pp. 87-91) offers more questions than answers.

To conclude, Mrs Korandová's work remains on the surface and in chaos. It repeats a few ideas of famous scholars and provides pages of ideas with no references and proper arguments. In addition to that, she fails to focus properly on issues that the US and Russian Federation are forced to cooperate on, such as disarmament, Iran, North Korea, or Afghanistan. The work suffers from the absence of hypothesis.

Based on the arguments above, I suggest to evaluate the Thesis as “3“ (**Good**) – depending on Mrs. Korandová's defence.

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